

“His Father’s Keeper”

by
Ch’oe Yun

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**Junior World Literature
Five to Eight Days with Framing Options**

CONTEXT

The Junior World Literature course is a relatively new addition to the curriculum at Upper Arlington High School. One of the goals of the faculty who teach the course is to add texts that represent a broader exposure to world cultures. Currently the focus is on increasing exposure to Asian, Indian, and Native American texts.

The emphasis of the course is on critical analysis of world texts (written, visual, and spoken) leading to discernment of cross-cultural connections. Ongoing synthesis experiences challenge students to assess the motifs that recur across time and geography—and to analyze how these similarities are shaped by specific cultural variables.

The common assessment for the Junior World Lit course is the “Junior Study”—an extended essay that calls for critical analysis and synthesis of a minimum of five course texts. Oral commentary is one of the preliminary activities used to help students practice the goals of the Junior Study. The following lessons will be presented late in the second quarter of study—prior to the time that students will be asked to submit the first installment for their Junior Study.

The lesson plans that follow would work effectively for any teacher who wants to encourage close reading and an increased awareness of the context in which writing is produced (new historicism / mimesis).

SUMMARY

Ch'angyon, the speaker in this short story, has come face to face with the father he never knew. The man who was only a ghost to him is now sitting in his living room and Ch'angyon is challenged by how to process the emotion that had, to this point, been suppressed. He asks his father at one point, “Do you know how your ghost haunted us all and left us all mentally crippled?” (262).

The protagonist seems to be torn between the desire to regain the father he never had and the desire to punish his father for all the turmoil his defection caused. He wants answers, yet is concerned that the answers may fall short of his expectations. He wants to connect with the man behind the ghost, yet feels smothered by his father's presence.

A moment of catharsis leads to some resolve as Ch'angyon's vision shifts and he is able to see the humanity of his father. In that revelation, Ch'angyon finds the grace to consider his father's needs. The questions aren't all answered—for the protagonist or for the reader—but, as Ch'angyon guides his father to the “Wall of Communards,” his comment that “We're practically there, Father” takes on more than literal meaning.

THE BIG PICTURE

“His Father’s Keeper”, written by Ch’oe Yun, is a model of modern Korean fictional techniques—“such as mixing fantasy with reality, disjointed time sequence, multiple versions of an episode, and so forth” (*Rainy Spell* 248).

Professor Mike Robinson indicates, “In the 80s and late 90s [texts], the nuances of the north and south Korean cultures are presented for the first time in a way other than that which reflects the division in ‘one way’ (with North Korea demonized)”. One of the markers of Postmodern literature is this motif of resentment and reconciliation. There is a challenge for writers to engage in the complex dynamics of relationship—of somehow connecting (or reconnecting) with others. “Keeper” reflects the difficult dynamic of resolution.

“Ch’oe shows that though modern Koreans seem to have traveled far from their past, there is really no escaping from their national heritage and that they have to find meaningful and constructive ways of embracing their past” (*Rainy Spell* 248). The fact that “the Korean national identity is a blood identity (a racial identity)” and that “Lineage / linkage with the past is built into the family system and is intensified by Ancestor Worship” (Robinson) may help to explain the intensity of the struggle faced by Ch’oe’s protagonist. The desire for familial connection is a strong rival to the desire to process socio-political variables.

Robinson indicates, “Literature of the 1950s reflects the pessimism of this cultural era”. Although “Keeper” was written in 1990, the action upon which the characters are reflecting would have occurred 40 years earlier (around the time that the author was born). The duality of time-setting plays the pessimism of War era Korea against the challenge for reconciliation reflected in the late 19th century.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

The following sets of questions will be used on the days indicated to help students process and generate response to “His Father’s Keeper”. Because the text will be read aloud in class, the questions are designed to help students focus on the reading and to cultivate discussion support (as opposed to being used for accountability). Possible answers and/or supporting text are included in italics.

Day One.

- 1. What parts of the text indicate the son’s attitude about his father? (Dealing with this question alone could support a complete day’s discussion. Play it by ear.)**

Page 249

- *“a tide of resentment rising in my throat”*

- *"Father inflamed my irritation"*
- *"I was tired of playing host to Father"*
- *"I spent many sleepless hours trying to remember Father...but...it was useless"*
- *His family had endured "bitter trials...as the relations of a defector"*
- *"the more one tries to keep one's father hidden from the world and out of one's consciousness, the more insistently he pops up at every turn"*
- *"I tried to imitate him when I was in a pessimistic mood, and rejected and denied him when I felt optimistic"*

Page 250

- *"[Father's letter evoked] certain misgiving, as if criminal evidence...had suddenly been exposed"*
- *"had paid dearly for their Father's defection to the North"*
- *"One of us felt that to invite Father would only open old wounds and create new heartbreaks and inconveniences"*
- *"...all of us were wondering whether Father's reappearance might not cause us inconveniences and disadvantages, even though the situation surrounding defector's families had altered greatly since the post-War days"*

Page 251

- *"...my brothers and I blamed Mother's death on the reemergence of our father. That vague resentful feeling came out from one of us at a moment of our blinding sorrow, and we did not hesitate to brand Father as a messenger of death who had brought disaster not only to Mother but to us as well"*

Page 252

- *"I was in the uncomfortable grip of an odd dread, and avoided any serious topic"*
- *"...an odd dread prevented me from questioning him further"*
- *"long and manifold hardships"*

Page 253

- *"...I wanted to escape the hateful stigma of being a defector's son"*
- *"I was the one who had to come up with the subjects for conversation"*
- *"each party was trying to avoid touching each other's sensitive spot"*
- *"old regrets"*

Page 254

- *"disappointment and resentment"*
- *"[kept] a stern watchful eye over his every movement and gesture"*
- *"[In the airport] my excitement amounted almost to hysteria"*
- *"tears rose from a deep well of resentment and bitterness"*

Page 255

- *"my dissatisfaction with Father threatened to erupt every few minutes. My emotions were looking for the least excuse to explode"*

- “[Your other family] are more precious to you than us”

Page 256

- “...his rare tone of affection only provoked my resentment.”
- “I struggled mightily to control my temper and be reasonable”
- “that very effort stung me to fury. In my anger, I saw in Father’s affectionate tone only a trick to avoid a possibly embarrassing topic”

Page 257

- “I detested such answers of Father’s which made the questioner look silly. My anger seethed in the face of Father’s attitude...”
- “Why did [Father] sacrifice his whole family for the sake of [Communism]? ...Wasn’t it an excessive sacrifice?”
- “...ready to explode at the least provocation”
- “The calmer Father was, the more agitated I became”
- “I refused to believe his answers”

Page 258

- (Jealous of Father’s family) “So you can’t go for more than a week without writing to that family”
- “I felt like a child severely rebuked...”
- “I didn’t believe his explanation”
- “I was trying to fix in my mind an image that kept becoming blurred”

Page 259

- “this same young man disturbed my sleep by appearing in my imagination as a North Korean spy”
- “His image...became more of a practical handicap and inconvenience”
- “You make me so nervous!”
- “I feel so uncomfortable when I see you sitting all day on that stool”

Page 261

- “I felt mortified...”
- “I could not understand what had made Father undertake such a big trip, when mother was no more”
- “His presence was nothing to be excited about, and nothing was to be expected from him. Everything would go back to normal in a month, when he went back...”
- “I turned half around feeling a hot sensation in my nose, like a child who had been affectionately addressed by a parent after long neglect”

Page 262

- “I shot back at him, with unconcealed sarcasm”
- “One like me, who does nothing but study weeds all his life, must look like a pitiful clod to someone like you who devoted his life to a lofty ideal”

- *"...it instantly transformed my vague discontent into a just indignation, making the contents of my accusation seem plain facts."*
- *"...the decision to live my life in a foreign country was a desperate escape"*
- *"Father was responsible for my blind-alley existence"*
- *"I refrained from calling into question the validity of his ideology itself. The restraint, however, must have owed more to my fear of having my suspicions confirmed than to some feeling of minimum filial deference"*
- *"Do you know how your ghost haunted us all and left us all mentally crippled?"*

Page 263

- *"I felt the urge to rush out of the apartment and deprive Father once and for all of the opportunity to explain himself"*
- *"I (the Father) imagine you wanted to see me become either a total failure, wailing self-reproach and asking for your Mother's forgiveness on bent knees, or a big shot in the other world, to give some meaning to all the tribulations you and your mother and brothers had to endure all these years"*

Page 264

- *"My suspicions, momentarily subdued by Father's earnest tone, reasserted themselves"*
- *"...what was all too clear—and to me totally unjustifiable—was Father's conviction that he could not have acted in any other way"*

Page 265

- *"In a way it seemed that the suspicions that had been dogging me for the past few days were confirmed."*
- *"I was harboring such insidious suspicion"*
- *"my head buzzing with confusion"*
- *"I recovered a measure of calm"*

Page 266

- *"...I, who had never experienced Father's love, asked myself"*

Page 267

- *"Father's belongings...somehow reminded me of my agonizing childhood"*
- *"That miserable spy was no one but me. I gazed at my culpable hands..."*

Page 268

- *"I'm sorry, Father"*

Page 269

- *"We're almost there" (probably kids won't colormark this, but it would be a great line to propose as a pivotal line in the story)*

Page 270

- “Two conflicting wishes, that they would go away quickly and they they would linger there for a long time and speak their thoughts without noticing our presence” [he’s speaking of the communist students and thinking of his father]
- “I answered, draping my arm across Father’s shoulders to screen him from the wind rushing toward us from the end of the path, ‘We’re practically there, Father.’”

2. How would you summarize what the son is thinking/feeling?

Answers will vary, but the summative response should be something like this: The son is carrying a lot of bitterness that centers on being abandoned—and specifically on being abandoned for a cause that may have been ultimately futile. The years of being able to address only the “ghost” of a father—and the enigmatic presence and character of the father he is now seeing—leave Ch’angyon incapable of processing his emotions effectively. He is hurt, angry, resentful, and suspicious. He is torn between wanting to lay the full weight of his life without Father on his Father’s shoulders, wanting to see some deep repentance from Father, and wanting to have all that was lost restored.

3. What is the father thinking? What motivates him?

Responses will vary and may be speculative. Students should be able to point to text support to defend their responses. Perhaps most intriguing to students will be Father’s statement that “I don’t tearfully repent my past. Neither do I have any medals to adorn my long struggles...” (264). He says later, “Once again, I tell you clearly that it was not to ask your forgiveness that I came her” (264).

4. What questions would you want to ask these characters?

Responses will vary. Once the questions are established, they become fodder for more discussion. What DOES the father want from his son? Why DID the father reconnect after so long? Why DID the son agree to meet with his father? And so on.

5. How would _____ (character from another culture) react in Ch’angyon’s situation?

Responses will vary as students self-direct the question. For example, students could compare Ch’angyon to Nwoye from Chinua Achebe’s Things Fall Apart: “In Ch’angyon’s situation, Nwoye, from Things Fall Apart, would not have had nearly the tolerance for his father that Ch’angyon did. Clearly, Ch’angyon was angry, hurt, confused, and so on, but still he stayed near and sought to learn the answers to some of the questions that had plagued him all of his life. His father respected Ch’angyon’s attitude and even his anger in a way that allowed Ch’angyon to process his thoughts. Nwoye wanted a relationship with his father, but his father’s convictions could not accommodate Nwoye’s personal paradigm. Okonkwo’s mind was set—there was one way to be a man, one way to be a warrior, one way to be an Igbo—and his “soft” son would never measure up. Although Ch’angyon contemplated getting away from his

Father, Nwoye actually left Okonkwo and his oppressive, self-serving personality to align himself with the Christian imperialists.

6. How would YOU react in Ch'angyon's situation?

Responses will vary. Expect evidence of a very "American teen" response—and perhaps testimony of the impact students have experienced with broken homes. In general, I predict that most kids would expect the son to tell his father off and then to kick him to the curb.

Day Two.

1. What assumptions can you make about Korean culture from "His Father's Keeper"?

Responses will vary. Expect conversation about family commitment (filial loyalty) and discussion of commitment to socio-political constructs

2. How are family roles defined in Korean culture? (What is expected of the husband/father? Of the wife/mother? Of the children?)

Responses will vary. It's important to allow speculation. "Right" answers are not as urgent as "possible" answers. Possibilities: Fathers are more committed to their beliefs than to their families; Families are more of a convenience; Women are committed to their husbands regardless of circumstances (notice that Mother never remarries while father remarries to further his cause); Children are to be loyal to their parents at all costs—whether the parents "deserve" it or not; etcetera.

3. What social variables impact Ch'angyon's family?

Again, speculation is more important than spot-on accurate assessment of the cultural climate. Responses will most likely involve trying to unpack the North Korea-South Korea dynamic and trying to get a handle on the role communism played in that dynamic.

4. What would make things "right" for Yi Ha-un (the father)?
5. What would make things "right" for Ch'angyon?

There's a bit of confusion about what exactly each of the characters is seeking in this reunion. Ch'angyon articulates mixed motives as he shares his thoughts with the reader. Responses will vary here, but the expectation is that student may process the questions from an affective position—responding through a personal lens (Reader Response). Look for the opportunity to challenge student responses as a way of encouraging more critical thinking [e.g. "Why might Ch'angyon not be satisfied with an apology from his father? Why isn't Ch'angyon content to tell Father off? Why doesn't Father just ask his son to forgive him?"]

6. What do you need to know to better understand what happens in this story? Develop at least three research questions. (These may be built on above questions you feel unprepared to answer effectively.)

Successful research questions will be ones that can have specific, extended answers. These questions will be used to shape student activity for day three.

7. Share your journal responses. From the feedback of your peers, select ONE other text to which you will compare “His Father’s Keeper”

ACTIVITIES

The following agenda lays out specific activities for each day of the “His Father’s Keeper” study. To honor student inquiry, it is important that the timing and events are seen as flexible guides. It is conceivable that debriefing certain discussion topics, for example, may lead to a period-long discussion of one question or one concept. Keep in mind that that type of dialogue is purposeful in helping students to think purposefully about literature. (Questions included in the following activities have been answered above.)

Pre-lesson Foundations: Concept Orientation

Prior to beginning “His Father’s Keeper,” consider ways to orient students to the themes being presented in the text: family, loyalty, conviction, abandonment, etc. I will distribute or create on the board a chart that includes these themes and titles of several of the texts we’ve already read. Students will be challenged to offer specific evidence of these themes at work across literature (this serves as a tool for practicing the synthesis that the following lesson and the Junior Study will call for). Part of developing the chart will be defining each of the themes: What do we mean by loyalty? What is the role of a father? What does it mean to be ‘convicted’ about something? Etc.

Day One: Guided reading of “His Father’s Keeper” / questions (classroom)

Building on the foundational discussions, I intend to distribute a Reading Guide at the beginning of the period. Our students are conditioned to colormark their texts as an investment in discussion and as a form of research. Students may not, then, actually have written responses for all of the questions. Depending on the class, it may make sense to break the reading into two days, allowing time for some discussion at the end of each period.

1. Distribute copies of “His Father’s Keeper” and encourage students to get out their color marking supplies

2. Distribute copies of the Reading Guide (see Appendix)
3. Read “His Father’s Keeper” aloud, encouraging students to (a) read and (b) comment on things that answer the Reading Guide prompts.
4. Allow some process time for student responses
5. Debrief student responses
6. Inform students that their marked texts and written responses will be the tools for their discussion groups tomorrow. The more thorough they are, the more purposeful they can expect their discussion groups to be.

❖ Journal Response: The plot of “His Father’s Keeper” is just like...

Day Two: Discussion Groups / Cultural Perceptions (classroom)

Yesterday (or the past two days, depending on the way Day One is processed) encouraged a close, observational reading of the text. In groups, students will now think more critically about what they have observed.

1. Ask student to get into their literature groups (or set up groups if they’re not already in place)
2. Distribute copies of the Group Discussion Guides (see Appendix)
3. Inform groups that they have the period to tease out “group consensus” about the topics presented on the Discussion Guide.
 - a. Groups may elect to continue discussion about yesterday’s reading observations first
 - b. By the end of the period, each group should have detailed opinions about Korean culture, family roles, social variables, and the specific needs of each of the characters in “His Father’s Keeper”.
 - c. Further, each group should have specific research questions for tomorrow and should identify ONE text to which they will compare “His Father’s Keeper.”
4. Research questions must be submitted for review by the end of the period.

❖ Journal Response: Summarize clearly, using text support whenever possible, the parallels between “His Father’s Keeper” and “[your group’s other text]”.

Day Three: Research Sub-Groups (computer lab)

I used to kill myself trying to know everything there is to know about the background, function, and literary value of every text I’m teaching. Two years ago, when I taught *The Merchant of Venice* for the first time, I confessed that I’d never read the play before—that I had a basic understanding of the plot but that I wouldn’t be the expert resource on this one. What a revelation! The study that followed was perhaps one of the richest I’d experienced in 15 years of teaching. Almost visibly, the students turned their gaze from me and refocused onto the text and each other. They would even say, “Don’t ask him; he

doesn't know." The purpose of the Research Sub-groups is to very respectfully say, "Why don't you find that out for yourself? And, when you do, why don't you share it with the rest of us?"

1. Encourage groups to meet for a quick briefing so they know what their goals for the day are. These goals should be driven by the following considerations:
 - a. Your group will become the experts on the context in which "His Father's Keeper" was produced;
 - b. Your group will become the experts on the context in which your chosen comparison text was produced;
 - c. Your group will develop an informed correlation of characteristics that appear in both "Keeper" and the comparison text you have selected;
 - d. Your overarching goal is to establish an informed, researched, accurate, non-speculative awareness of the cultural climate of Korea and then to compare it accurately to the cultural climate of your comparison text.
2. Groups may choose to subdivide to approach different relevant research areas.
3. As groups address their research, distribute copies of the Oral Commentary Prompt (see Appendix)
4. Students should continue their research to prepare for tomorrow's Group Synthesis Seminar

Day Four: Discussion Groups / Synthesis and preparation (classroom and/or lab)

This day is designed as a synthesis day wherein group members draw from Reading Guides, Group Response Guides, and group research to develop an Oral Commentary to be presented, as a group, tomorrow in class. Monitor today's activity by visiting groups, inquiring about discoveries and perspectives, and reiterating the purpose of the Oral Commentary. Be sensitive to the fact that this day may need to be extended into two days. If so, consider having one group commit to presenting at the end of the second day. Especially if the Oral Commentary is a new project for students, it will be purposeful to have a teaching model so the other groups can reconfigure as necessary.

1. Distribute the Oral Commentary Rubric (see Appendix).
2. Review, briefly, the parameters of the Oral Commentary Prompt (distributed yesterday—see Appendix). Underscore the call for this to be an episode of "expertise"—"you have read, responded, reasoned, and researched. Now pull together your group's discoveries and develop a presentation that will teach us what you have learned."
3. Remind students that oral commentaries—like any literary analysis—require a clear controlling statement (a thesis statement). "As you review your collective research, look for the MAIN point your group wants to make. Build your controlling statement on this."
4. Accommodate group preparation for the remainder of the period, visiting groups as they work.

5. Students should be reminded to complete PRIOR to presentation day any visuals, handouts, etc. that they will need for an effective presentation.

Day Five: Oral Commentaries

My experience with Oral Commentaries is that they serve to affirm student thought. Regardless of the front-end orientation—or even previous experience—the Commentary experience always seems to be revelational for kids. They see—in themselves and in their peers—that they DO know things, that they ARE capable of critical thought, that they CAN articulate unique ideas in winsome ways. Depending on the number of groups involved and the depth of follow-up conversation, this activity may take up to three days to complete.

1. Because of the temptation for “last minute” preparation, I ask student groups to place all of their presentation materials (including notes, if permitted) in one area of the room.
2. Distribute a Peer Review sheet (see Appendix) to each of the students as they enter the room.
3. As groups present, have several peer reviewers complete a response using the Peer Review sheet (select as many kids as you have in a group). Other students may choose to take notes or may just listen.
4. Following each presentation, call for response from the peer reviewers. Solicit response from other students as the next group gets ready to prepare.
5. Remember that, while the Oral Commentaries most explicitly revolve around cultural comparison, there are other important things happening:
 - a. Students are learning to think critically about each other's thinking
 - b. Students are learning to analyze the input of others respectfully
 - c. Students are hearing their own voices functioning in an authoritative way
 - d. Students are subjecting their ideas to a “jury of their peers”

- ❖ Journal Response: “What themes in ‘His Father's Keeper’ are universal and what themes are unique to Korean culture?”

Beyond Day Five

Take at least part of the day after Oral Commentaries to discuss the idea presented in the journal question: “What themes in ‘His Father's Keeper’ are universal and what themes are unique to Korean culture?” Ideally, students will now be prepared to respond to both prompts in an informed way.

Then, consider the following options:

1. Ask students to return to their original impressions about Korea and clarify which impressions were accurate and which were not;

2. Ask student to create a piece of poetry that conveys the “essence” of “His Father's Keeper”;
3. Ask students to select one of the two other Korean texts (See “Connections to other literary works”) to read. As they read, they should look for similarities—“evidence” which proves the accuracy of their assessment of Korean culture;
4. Ask students to develop an original piece of text that reflects what they believe to be the traits unique to Korean culture;
5. Carry all that has been discussed into the reading of a text representing a culture that has not yet been visited.

CONNECTIONS TO OTHER LITERARY WORKS

The focus of this study is rooted in comparison to other texts that have already been part of the course. Students, then, will suggest many connections to other literary texts. Following the Oral Commentaries, I intend to provide two other short stories for students to read. Each of the stories takes place in Korea and each monopolizes on the relationship between parent and child.

“Lost Names” by Richard Kim. In this short story, the narrator reflects on his childhood experience of walking through snow with his father to change their names from Korean names to Japanese names. Throughout the text, the snow imagery serves to reflect the covering over of the Korean culture. The correspondence between the father and his son is quite different than the relationships represented in “His Father's Keeper” and “Scarlet Fingernails”.

“Scarlet Fingernails” by Kim Min-suk. This story, written just three years prior to “His Father's Keeper,” closely mirrors the internal struggle that Ch'angyon has as he seeks resolve in his relationship with his father. Like “Keeper”, this text represents the aftershock of a father's defection to Communist North Korea. Moreover, it challenges the reader to debate the weight and expectation of family relationships.

“Byoung's Troublesome Trio” by Greg Varner. This story has yet to be written, but it will reflect the challenges a “nice Korean man” faces as he seeks to balance his responsibilities as a PhD student with the idiosyncrasies of raising three Korean daughters in the American Midwest. (I made this up, but this whole study was starting to feel a little too serious.)

RESOURCES

Ch'oe Yun, “His Father's Keeper.” In *Rainy Spell and Other Korean Stories*. USA: Korean National Commission for UNECO, 1998.

Clark, Donald N. and Shirokauer, Conrad. *Modern East Asia: A Brief History*. Canada: Thompson Wadsworth, 2004.

Kim, Daniel. "Korea: Colonialism, Division and the Emergence of a Korean Voice in Literature". *EASC Summer Workshop: Teaching East Asian Literature in the High School*. July 20, 2006.

Robinson, Mike. "Korean Literature: South Korean Literature in the Post-liberation Period (1945-present)". *EASC Summer Workshop: Teaching East Asian Literature in the High School*. July 20, 2006.

APPENDICES (presented on the following pages as copy-ready masters)

1. Reading Guide
2. Group Discussion Guide
3. Oral Commentary Prompt
4. Oral Commentary Rubric
5. Peer Response Sheet

❖ **Journal Response: The plot of “His Father’s Keeper” is just like...**

“His Father’s Keeper”

Group Discussion Guide

As a group you will have the period to tease out “group consensus” about the topics presented on the Discussion Guide. As you work, keep the following guidelines in mind:

- a. Groups may elect to continue discussion about yesterday’s reading observations first*
- b. By the end of the period, each group should have detailed opinions about Korean culture, family roles, social variables, and the specific needs of each of the characters in “His Father’s Keeper”.*
- c. Further, each group should have specific research questions for tomorrow and should identify ONE text to which they will compare “His Father’s Keeper.”*

1. What assumptions can you make about Korean culture from “His Father’s Keeper”?
2. How are family roles defined in Korean culture? (What is expected of the husband/father? Of the wife/mother? Of the children?)
3. What social variables impact Ch’angyon’s family?
4. What would make things “right” for Yi Ha-un (the father)?
5. What would make things “right” for Ch’angyon?
6. What do you need to know to better understand what happens in this story? Develop at least three research questions. (These may be built on above questions you feel unprepared to answer effectively. Submit a copy of your Research Questions by the end of the period.)
7. Share your journal responses from last night with each other. From the feedback of your peers, select ONE other text to which you will compare “His Father’s Keeper”

- ❖ **Journal Response:** Summarize clearly, using text support whenever possible, the parallels between “His Father’s Keeper” and “[your group’s other text]”.

**“His Father’s Keeper”
Oral Commentary Prompt**

Background: Soon, we will be starting our first formal investment in the Junior Study. That task calls for students to analyze and synthesize course texts. As an investment in that project, it is important that we continue to practice critical thinking skills—and that we develop proficiency at articulating our observations. Today’s activity will offer experience in both areas.

Prompt: With your group, discuss the correlations you between “His Father’s Keeper” and the comparison text your group selected. Develop a four-to-five-minute presentation that eloquently summarizes your observations and links them to research about Korean culture. Your oration will include a controlling (thesis) statement, clear branches of support, and direct references to the texts.

Format: The entire group will address the class from the front of the room. Although you may choose to jot down a few guiding notes, you may not read to us. The delivery of your information should flow smoothly—with the group collectively working as one voice.

The most successful student writers will:

- Include a clear, defining response to the prompt / controlling statement
- Include appropriate and well-articulated branches of support
- Defend major points with focused, inventive, appropriate reasoning
- Strategically incorporate text support / fully defend assertions of the panel
- Present commentary in academic voice
- Use opening and closing comments to effectively frame the commentary
- Strategically involve every member of the panel in the presentation
- Completely fill allotted presentational time frame

Due Dates:

“His Father's Keeper”

Oral Commentary Holistic Scoring Guide

8-9 Demonstrates Excellent Achievement

Presentation includes a clear, definitive controlling statement
Commentary includes appropriate and well-articulated branches of support
Panel defends major points with focused, inventive, appropriate reasoning
Text support is strategically incorporated / fully defends assertions of the panel
Commentary is presented in academic voice
Opening and closing comments effectively frame the commentary
Every member of the panel is strategically involved in the presentation
Commentary completely fills presentational time frame

6-7 Demonstrates Advanced Achievement

Presentation includes a clear controlling statement
Commentary includes appropriate branches of support
Panel defends major points with focused, purposeful, appropriate reasoning
Text support is purposefully incorporated / accurately defends assertions of the panel
Commentary is presented in academic voice with few lapses
Opening and closing comments purposefully frame the commentary
Every member of the panel is actively involved in the presentation
Commentary fills most of the presentational time frame

4-5 Demonstrates Average Achievement

Presentation includes a controlling statement
Commentary includes general branches of support
Panel defends major points with purposeful, understandable reasoning
Text support is incorporated / defends assertions of the panel
Commentary is presented in academic voice with many lapses
Opening and closing comments frame the commentary
Every member of the panel is involved in the presentation
Commentary falls short of presentational time frame / runs long

2-3 Demonstrates Minimal Achievement

Presentation includes a general topical statement
Commentary includes undefined or unrelated branches of support
Panel defends major points with reasoning that may lack focus or connectedness
Text support is minimal / may fail to defend assertions of the panel
Commentary is presented in casual voice
Opening / closing may be minimal or missing
Member(s) of the panel is under-involved in the presentation
Commentary runs very short of presentational time frame

1 Demonstrates Unacceptable Achievement

“His Father's Keeper”

Oral Commentary Peer Response

What is the overarching point presented by your peers? (What is the controlling statement?)

What are the major points of defense you heard in their presentation?

What other areas of support would YOU have added to this presentation?

List three questions that this group should be able to answer.

1.

2.

3.

Your name: